

## Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-03

INFO OCT-01 SS-07 ISO-00 /011 R

66619

DRAFTED BY NEA/PAB:PDCONSTABLE/MW

APPROVED BY NEA/PAB:PDCONSTABLE

NEA/INS:DKUX

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R 202208Z MAY 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

S E C R E T STATE 105233

LIMDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT NEW DELHI 6598 ACTION STATE, INFO LONDON  
20 MAY 1974. QUOTE:

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 6598

LIMDIS

LONDON FOR MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MCAP, PARM, TECH, PINT, IN

SUBJECT: INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION: WHY NOW?

1. INDIA HAS EXPLODED A NUCLEAR DEVICE AT A TIME WHEN INDIA  
IS IN DEEP ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY AND THE GOVERNMENT IS CONTENDING  
WITH A RISING TIDE OF DISILLUSIONMENT AND DISCONTENT. CORRUPT-  
TION, MISMANAGEMENT, LABOR INDUSCIPLINE, RAMPANT INFLATION,  
FOOD SHORTAGES, AND THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH COST OF CRUDE HAVE  
LED TO DISMAL ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND SEVERE POLITICAL UNREST.  
THE TURMOIL EARLIER THIS YEAR IN GUJARAT AND THEN BIHAR,  
SCATTERED SMALL-SCALE VIOLENCE, AND THE CURRENT RAIL STRIKE  
HAVE CONFRONTED THE GOVERNMENT WITH A SERIES OF CRISES IN

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MAINTAINING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCIPLINE.

2. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THIS GENERAL DOMESTIC GLOOM AND UNCERTAINTY WEIGHED SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE BALANCE OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR DECISION. THE NEED FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST, THE HOPE OF RECREATING THE ATMOSPHERE OF EXHILARATION AND NATIONALISM THAT SWEEPED THE COUNTRY AFTER 1971--CONTRARY TO OUR EARLIER EXPECTATION--MAY HAVE TIPPED THE SCALES.

3. INTERNATIONALLY, INDIA IN RECENT YEAR HAS FELT IT HAD BEEN RELEGATED TO THE SIDELINES WITH ITS SIGNIFICANCE IGNORED AND ITS POTENTIAL ROLE DOWNPLAYED. THE FEELING THAT IT NEEDED TO DEMONSTRATE ITS NUCLEAR CAPABILITY IN ORDER TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN A PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENT IN ITS DECISION.

4. THE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF INDIA'S TRIPARTITE NEGOTIATIONS WITH PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH IN EARLY APRIL MAY HAVE INFLUENCED THE TIMING OF THE EXPLOSION. INDIA PROBABLY WANTED TO WIND UP THIS PHASE OF CLEARING UP THE PROBLEMS FROM 1971 BEFORE MOVING AHEAD WITH AN ACTION WHICH WAS CERTAIN TO UPSET ITS RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN.

5. WE ARE AWARE OF NO RECENT MILITARY PRESSURE OF THE GOVERNMENT TO GO NUCLEAR.

6. THERE HAS BEEN, HOWEVER, NO RECENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL PRESSURE FOR INDIA TO GO NUCLEAR. IN FACT, THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY QUIESCENT DURING THE PAST YEAR. RIGHTWING NATIONALIST JANA SANGH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT HAVE PRESSED THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT FROM TIME TO TIME, AS THEY HAVE IN PAST YEARS, ABOUT LAGGING PROGRESS IN THE NUCLEAR FIELD AND ABOUT WHY THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOT TAKING STEPS TO ACQUIRE A NUCLEAR CAPABILITY. BUT THESE OCCASIONAL SALLIES WERE ANSWERED BY STANDARD POLICY STATEMENTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBILITIES OF "PEACEFUL" NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS AND THAT INDIA WOULD USE ATOMIC ENERGY ONLY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. WITH A LARGE CONGRESS MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT PRESSURE FROM THE FEW VOCAL RIGHT-WINGERS COULD BE CONTAINED.

7. AT THIS STAGE WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN INDIA'S DECISION TO EXPLODE  
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A NUCLEAR DEVICE WAS TAKEN. NOR DO WE KNOW EXACTLY HOW THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION, DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS INFLUENCED THE TIMING OF EXPLOSION. IT SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE DECISION WAS TAKEN BY MRS. GANDHI, THAT IT WAS SUPPORTED OR ACCEPTED BY THOSE OF HER ASSOCIATES THAT KNEW OF THE DECISION, AND THAT THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP BELIEVED THE DECISION WOULD REDOUND TO THEIR CREDIT DOMESTICALLY.

8. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DECISION WILL APPEAL TO NATIONALIST FEELING AND WILL BE WIDELY WELCOMED BY THE INDIAN POPULACE. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN TO WHAT EXTENT THE GOVERNMENT WILL SUCCEED IN TRANSLATING THIS FEELING INTO TANGIBLE POLITICAL RETURNS. GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO BE TEMPTED TO SEIZE ON INTERNATIONAL BACKLASH, CONDEMNATION AND RETRIBUTION TO APPEAL FOR ITS OWN DOMESTIC PURPOSES TO CHAUVINIST FEELING AT HOME. THE PICTURE OF A GOVERNMENT EMBATTLED AND STANDING UP TO FOREIGN ABUSE COULD BE QUITE USEFUL TO THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP TODAY.

9. DEPARTMENT REPEAT AS DESIRED. SCHNEIDER

UNQUOTE RUSH

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NNN

## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS, NUCLEAR TESTS, UNDERGROUND EXPLOSIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, POPULAR SUPPORT, POLITICAL SITUATION  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 20 MAY 1974  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GarlanWA  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1974STATE105233  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** PDCONSTABLE/MW  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D740125-1021  
**From:** STATE  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1974/newtext/t19740532/aaaabcpo.tel  
**Line Count:** 128  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ORIGIN NEA  
**Original Classification:** SECRET  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:**  
**Previous Classification:** SECRET  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GarlanWA  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 15 APR 2002  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <15 APR 2002 by garlanwa>; APPROVED <26 FEB 2003 by GarlanWA>  
**Review Markings:**

Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
30 JUN 2005

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION: WHY NOW?  
**TAGS:** MCAP, PARM, TECH, PINT, IN  
**To:** DACCA ISLAMABAD  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005